



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

INFLUENCE OF THE PRIMARY ELECTION UPON PARTY ORGANIZATION

BY PROF. JESSE MACY

Iowa College

We are now in the midst of the third period of radical party readjustment to new governmental conditions, and I am requested to forecast the probable effects upon party organization. The readjustment which we are now experiencing is clearly in response to a popular demand. In the two earlier instances there were likewise elements which were adapted to popular needs.

Even the legislative caucus, in State and nation, which was the first form of organization for the two great national parties, met an obvious need. The voters were already divided into two main groups of opposing opinions and party names had been assumed. Some means were required to give effect to party opinion. The voters were widely distributed. Communication was slow and difficult. At each State capital, and at the national capital, there were already gathered law makers chosen by the people of each locality. It was in entire harmony with the needs of the period that these representatives should assume and exercise the added function of making party nominations. It was, however, only for federal, State, and district offices that the legislative caucus made nominations. For the smaller areas—towns, cities, and counties—other methods were employed.

The legislative caucus was always subject to criticism. Its action was viewed by many as an unauthorized assumption of power. Only in the absence of other more direct organs for giving effect to party opinion was it acceptable. Out of the experience of towns, cities and counties a more direct nominating process was gradually developed for the wider areas. It was customary to choose delegates in local party caucus to meet in party convention, to formulate party policy, and to nominate candidates. In time, and in accordance with the popular wish, the delegate convention system was so extended as to wholly displace the legislative caucus. With the advent of the convention there has come into existence a vast array of party machinery, in the form of permanent party committees. In its origin this ma-

chinery answered a real need. The voters were still widely scattered and communication was still slow and difficult. The loosely constructed system of local, State, and general government tended also still farther to separate and divide the people. In the beginning the party conventions and the party committees were effective organs for resisting disintegration and promoting national unity.

While the system of party machinery has grown, there has come into use the railway, the telegraph, the telephone, and rural postal delivery. By means of the daily press the people of the State, of the entire nation, are brought together. There is thus made possible a sort of daily session or town meeting for the whole body politic. Party organs, which in their origin were eminently serviceable, are no longer needed to bring the people together. As the newspaper and other agencies for easy and direct communication have become universal, the discarded or neglected party machinery has fallen into the hands of vested interests, whose use of our political agencies is often adverse to the public good. This condition has given rise to the present effort for the readjustment of party machinery. Direct nominations at primary elections are being substituted for the nominating conventions.

The first and most obvious change, therefore, is the tendency to eliminate the nominating convention. How far this will go is as yet only a matter of conjecture. Thus far the nomination of candidates for the presidency by popular vote has not been seriously considered, but provision is made in many States for the popular election of delegates to the national convention. Since the general government has no machinery for holding elections, the national nominating convention is likely to endure so long as distinctly party nominations are made.

The system of party conventions has served other purposes than the nomination of candidates. It has assisted in the formation and expression of party issues. The convention has given rise to the party platform. If there is no State convention, how can there be a State platform? There exists a strong tendency to retain the State convention even though its nominating function be lost. Yet, as voters become accustomed to the new nominating process, the party platform is likely to emanate more and more directly from the utterances of the successful candidates. In a State, therefore, where many nominations are made for a variety of functions, there will be little use for a State party platform.

Our system of permanent party committees also grew out of the convention. With the passing of the convention many of the functions of the committee will disappear. The party may still maintain agents to look after registration and to guard party interests at primary elections. The functions of the campaign committee will remain. Yet even here the new method is likely to effect important changes. As the party platform passes from the convention to the candidate, so the party committee is likely to become more and more an agency of the candidate.

A more important change to be effected by the primary election is found in the distinction which it enforces between State and federal politics. The earlier system of party conventions with its vast array of party machinery tended to obliterate the distinction between State and nation. The two governments which the constitution makes distinct were, in the hands of party committees, fused together in such a way as to render intelligent action on the part of the voter difficult or impossible. The new system enforces a separation and compels a distinction between State and federal politics. The convention system and the existing national committees still serve in the management of federal politics, while in the States a radically different system is adopted. This in itself enforces a difference and a contrast.

The new method also furnishes the means for partially removing the one instance of capital maladjustment in our Federal Constitution. I refer to the provision for the election of United States senators, which has resulted in compelling the voter, in a single act, to attempt the impossible task of expressing an opinion on the policies of two governments which the Constitution makes distinct. When he votes for men to make laws for his State, it is a mere accident if these men represent his views in national politics. Through the device of a primary election it has been found possible virtually to relieve the State legislature of the responsibility of selecting United States senators. This makes it possible to develop and maintain distinct and independent policies in the States.

The primary election has not come alone. The referendum and the popular initiative are important attendants. These new agencies together are likely to have far-reaching effects upon the party system. There has ever been a considerable body of citizens who have been opposed to anything like corporate and responsible party government. This opinion has persisted for a hundred years.

It has been strengthened by the obvious abuse of the party machine fallen into the hands of vested interests. The question is therefore seriously raised whether the continuance of what has been known as party government is desirable. This is a question of a different order from that of mere change in organization. It involves consideration of the discarding of the old political agencies and methods. It is maintained that the people no longer need an organic corporate body to serve as an intermediary between themselves and their government. If, as incident to present popular movements, this view should prevail, the party, in the old sense of the word, would drop out of use. Party names might survive but they would denote groups of voters devoted to special interests and opinions. They would no longer designate organizations assuming the responsibilities of government.